

# THE WOOD CARVER

by  
GRACE  
NOLL  
CROWELL



illustrated by  
Lee Mero

## THE AUTHOR

Grace Noll Crowell is nationally known for her poetry and stories. She has been writing since 1906 and has published volumes of poems for both children and adults. Her stories are primarily appealing to the young, or the young-in-heart.

Mrs. Crowell was born in Iowa, but has spent most of her adult life in Texas. She is the mother of three children. In 1935 she was named the Poet Laureate of Texas, and in 1938 she was chosen as the American Mother of the Year by the Golden Rule Foundation.

## THE ILLUSTRATOR

The illustrations for the works of Grace Noll Crowell published by Augsburg Publishing House are created by Lee Mero, a Minneapolis artist. In his drawings the spirit of each Crowell story is caught and enhanced.

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Copyright 1954  
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*This book is dedicated to all lovers  
of the Christ Child, and to all who  
find pleasure in the workmanship  
of a true artist's hands.*

# THE WOOD CARVER



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**BACK** in the middle eighties of the last century, Paul Friedrich of Switzerland brought over the great waters many things of inestimable worth.

One could have seen only a shabby, stalwart man and a little blond crippled lad as they alighted upon American shores; but



poor though they were, there was wealth there nevertheless. It was not carried in the huge bag swung over the man's shoulder, nor was it encased in the small carved chest which he guarded so carefully as they emerged from their steerage passage. It was rather a thing of the heart: the love of God in a man's soul, a trust in Him for the future in the new land, and a hope that burned like embers, that there was sure to be healing for the lameness that kept the little son from being able to run and play happily out in the wind and sun as did other boys. Surely even this could be found in a miracle-working land. And there was shining faith in his heart that tranquility and peace lay ahead like a roadway silvered with light.

To be sure, Paul's heart had all but broken when he lost his beautiful golden-haired Margaretha, who had died at the birth of little Peter seven years before; but time has

a blessed way of blurring the jagged edges of sorrow, and when William, his brother, wrote that he had found prosperity in the new land and urged Paul to leave the old country and come to America, he came. There was nothing too good for the little son. Surely many unbelievable things awaited them, and Paul would follow his old trade and they would live happily.

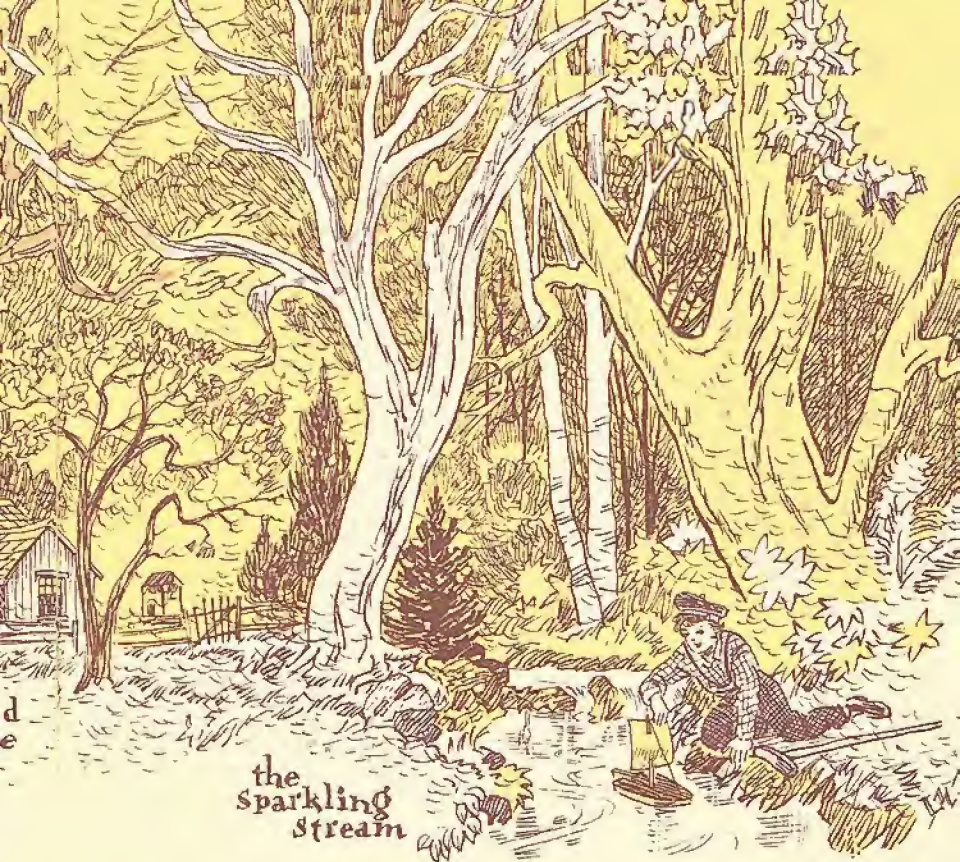
The child had been born with a lameness of the hip. This had hurt the father until it was like a physical agony of his own. He suffered over it far more than did little happy-hearted Peter, who had limped about the small room, or had walked haltingly around the flower-bordered yard in Switzerland.

So here they were, settled at last at the edge of a small mid-western village. The well-to-do William had helped Paul purchase the weathered cottage nestled among a fine grove of oaks and cedars.



The cottage all but dipped its feet into the sparkling stream that sang past its doorstep—a little, bright creek that was a joy to listen to and to look at as it went on its happy laughing way.





The cedars were beautifully green the year around, growing more brilliant as the winter came on, with their clusters of blueberries like so much frosted winter fruit. The oaks were good company, staunch and friendly.

Paul had his trade which he worked at for their living. He set up his hand-made loom and it was not long before the village women knew of his good, honest work as a carpet weaver. They came bringing their brightly dyed rags wound into solid balls for the weaving. Paul's work pleased them. He was conscientious, and prompt in finishing the widths of carpeting. He did well the things to which he turned his hand; but the carpet weaving was a bread and butter trade—not the joy that was his other work.



Paul  
at his  
loom



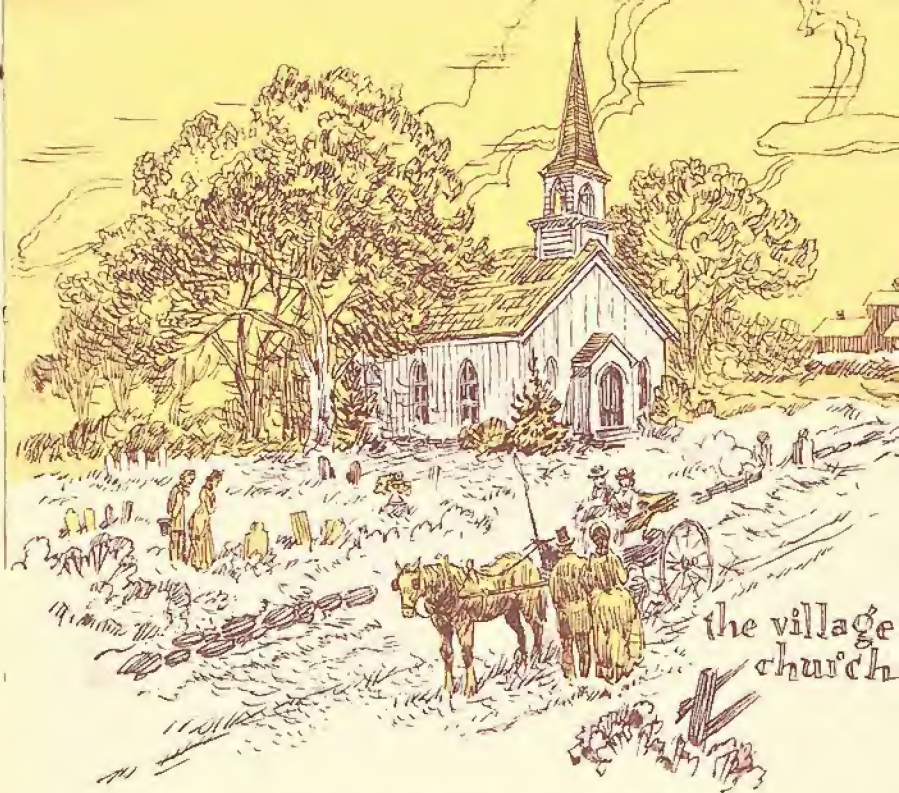
It was in the evening that he and little Peter would settle themselves for the happiest hours of the day. Then Paul would take down the carved chest which held his wood-carving tools—the mallet and chisel, the oil stone, the numerous little sharp steel blades, and he would be ready for his task. This work was like manna to the hungry; it was what a violin is to its master, a pen to the poet, a brush to the artist. He would work at times as if tongues of fire had descended upon him, so great was the excitement of accomplishment. Then there were other times when suddenly his hands would fall at his side and he would shake his head sadly and cry: "I cannot catch it! It has gone from me!"

Always there was little Peter sitting quietly by who would answer: "But you will, my Father. It will come back—it always does!" And Paul would take up the mallet or bright

steel blade, and bend once more above the rough-hewn wood. For if the fire no longer burned in his heart, he would lay the work down and say: "Come, little Son, we will wait for God's hand to guide," and they would go to rest.

Paul had already sacrificed several of his finest oaks for this particular purpose. Timber must be well seasoned for wood carving. The sap must be gotten rid of or it would cause a dry rot. It must be washed out by placing the cut logs in running water. Then the wood must be thoroughly freed of the water, and at last the fragrant golden timber would lie ready for the carver's skill.

Paul was at work now on the most ambitious project of his life: a crèche for his church at the other side of the village, the church so like his beloved one in Switzerland—a square white edifice with a tall steeple that held a silver bell which pealed forth



every evening at sundown, reminding the faithful to pause at whatever task they were doing, and pray to God. Clear as a crystal voice it sounded over the village, and Paul and little Peter invariably stopped where they were and bowed their heads reverently in a prayer of gratitude and praise.

Last year on Christmas Eve, their first one in the new land, they had come home across the snow, talking earnestly together. "Father," said little Peter, "it was most beautiful in the church tonight, but would it not be more beautiful if they had a crèche such as my book shows, with the baby Jesus and the father and mother and the sheep and a bossy cow gathered about the Christ Child?"

And Paul had agreed that it would indeed be much better if such a thing could be. The very next morning he went out and felled five of his finest oaks and began the laborious process of perfecting them for their great mission. Always he prayed as he worked. He was humble before the monumental task he had set for himself. As he worked on the holy family he often felt the task was far beyond his power.

"How can I, a humble man, represent so great sanctity?" he would cry. Then the on-



rush of inspiration would flood in upon him and he would work with a power beyond himself. Always, too, there was the hope that if he could only do some service for the Christ that his little son who sat so patiently beside him, would someday know the healing hand of this same Lord Jesus.

He longed to do something so beautiful with that little form that lay all but completed on the bed of hay, with the dimpled hands and feet—the face glowing warmly in the cottage light. That face was the greatest work of love that Paul had ever attempted—a baby face, yet back of it was a golden glow, and the sturdy strength that the oak had gathered throughout the years from the snow and wind and rain as it reached skyward, yet ever kept its feet firmly anchored to the ground with the little silver stream feeding its roots. Yes, there was something of the oak in the child, yet something more—the soft-



ness of babyhood and the tenderness of the later years that was revealed by the hand of the carver.

Truly there was a light on the Child's face—an inner light placed there by the hand of God himself. Paul marveled at it, and little Peter would stand reverently before it, not offering to touch it, but satisfied with simply looking.

Paul had succeeded in capturing the delicate beauty of the young Mother's face. He put his Margaretha

Mary



there and wept as he worked. He crystallized with great simplicity the folds of her drapery, the shrouding hood, and he brought forth the tenderness of her touch as she leaned above the Child. He carved Joseph, standing broodingly, a tall, earnest man stooping a bit above his Beloved, and the Child, his staff in his hand, ready for whatever arduous journey lay ahead.

Back in the shadows knelt a soft-eyed ox, while two lambs peered curiously over the edge

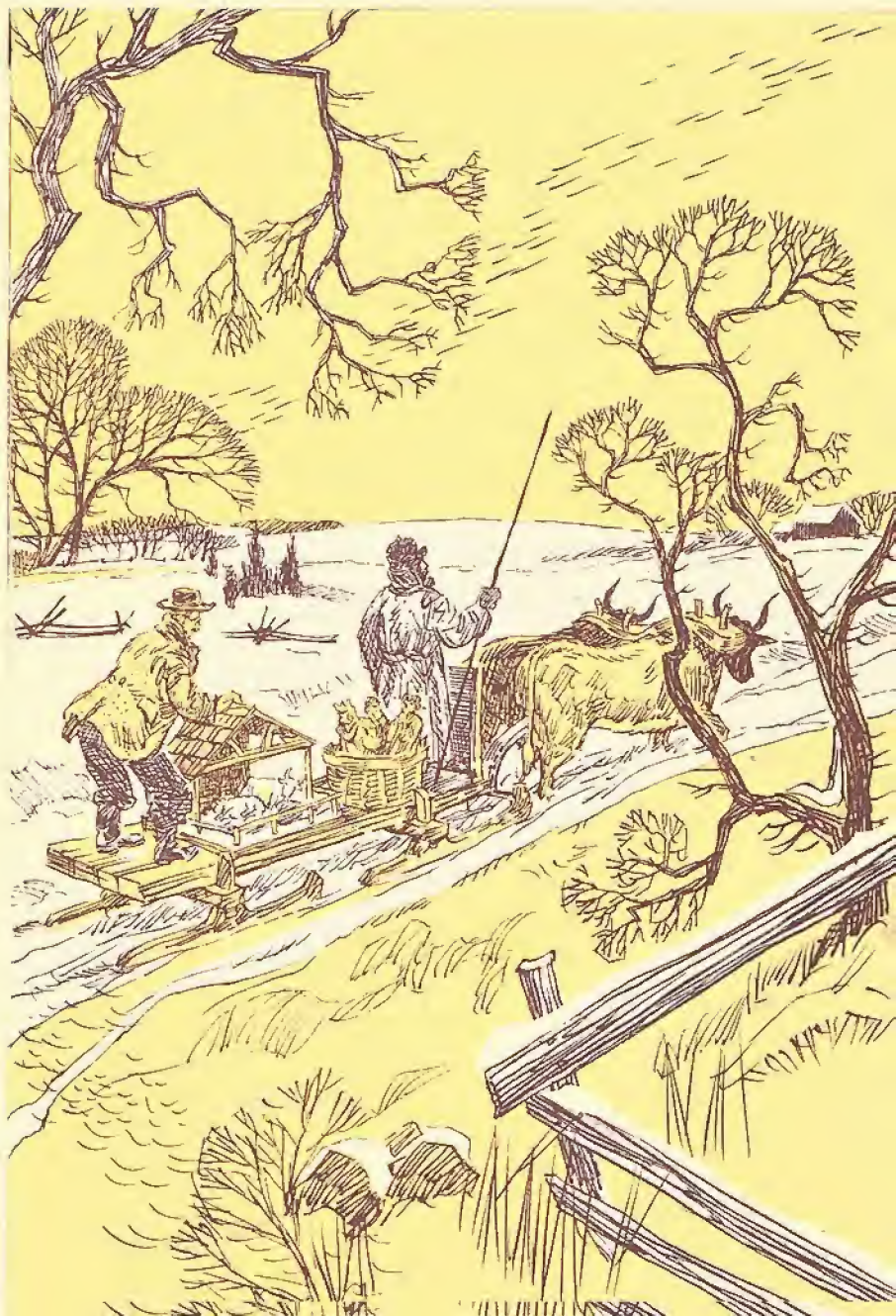


of the manger. These beautiful figures, grouped in perfect unity, made a balanced whole. Peter was ecstatic with joy as he watched each take form beneath his father's skilled hands. "Some day," he would cry, "I, too, shall make a crèche for a great cathedral, and I shall make you very proud, Father." And Paul would reply, "I trust it may be so. Pray always to God for help, my Son, and you will do great things."

At last it was Christmas Eve afternoon. The snow was too deep for little Peter to go with his father to the church. Paul had to enlist the help of a neighbor to carry the heavy crèche across town. After placing it before the altar, Paul went home to prepare for the evening services.

Later on he carried little Peter "piggy-back" down the path his own feet had made through the snow. The stars were out in all their silver glory. The boy pointed out one





which hung above the steeple of the church and said: "It is His star, Father. See, it is stopping above your crèche." And Paul had the feeling that it truly might be so. The white church glistened in the moonlight. Through the tall beautiful windows the colors glowed like so many rich jewels. The silver bell was calling the people from far and near to come to the Christmas Eve services, and they came—in singles and throngs. They came on foot and on horseback. The sleigh bells jingled merrily over the snow as a joy-





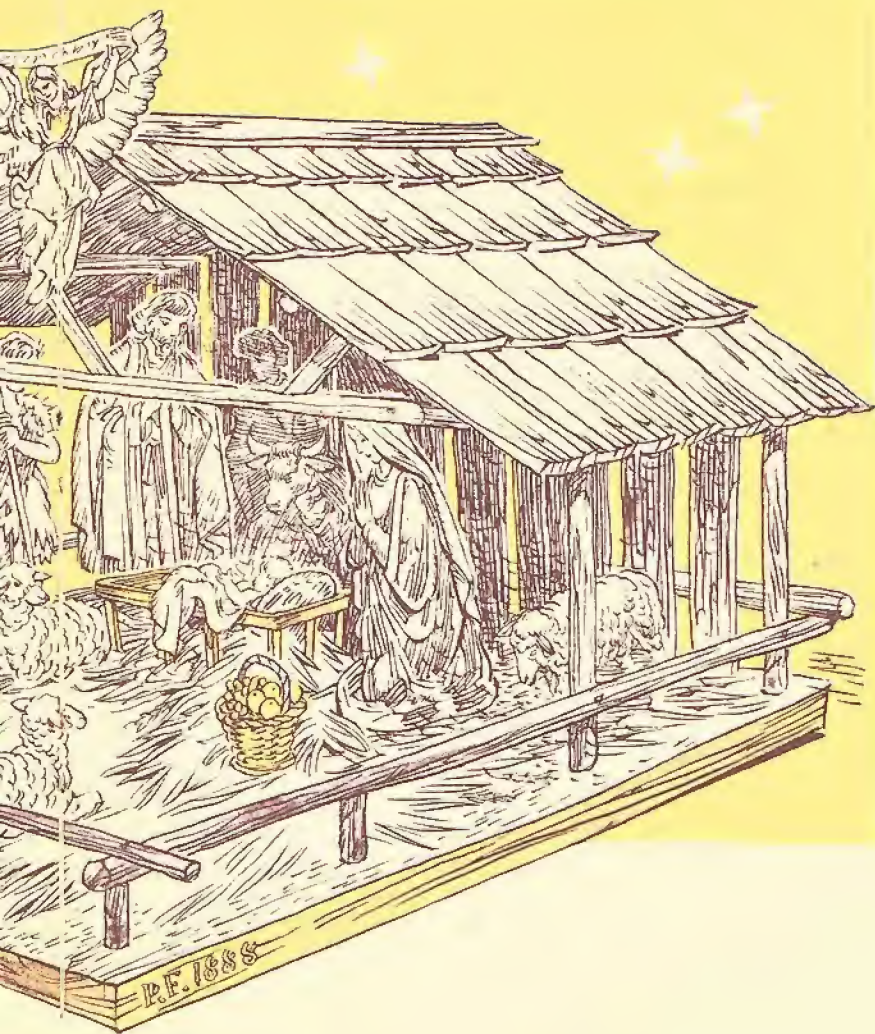
ous people gathered in memory of the Child.

It was the greatest event of the year. The candle lighted tree stood tall and proud. The cranberry and popcorn chains gleamed in the flickering light. The tarlatan bags were bulging with nuts and candy and the one precious orange of the year. The happy throng greeted the expected sight, but when their eyes fell upon the crèche at the altar, a reverent hush silenced each one. Here was something new and beautiful! It was filled with a golden light, such as they had never before beheld.





This is  
the Crèche  
that Paul built





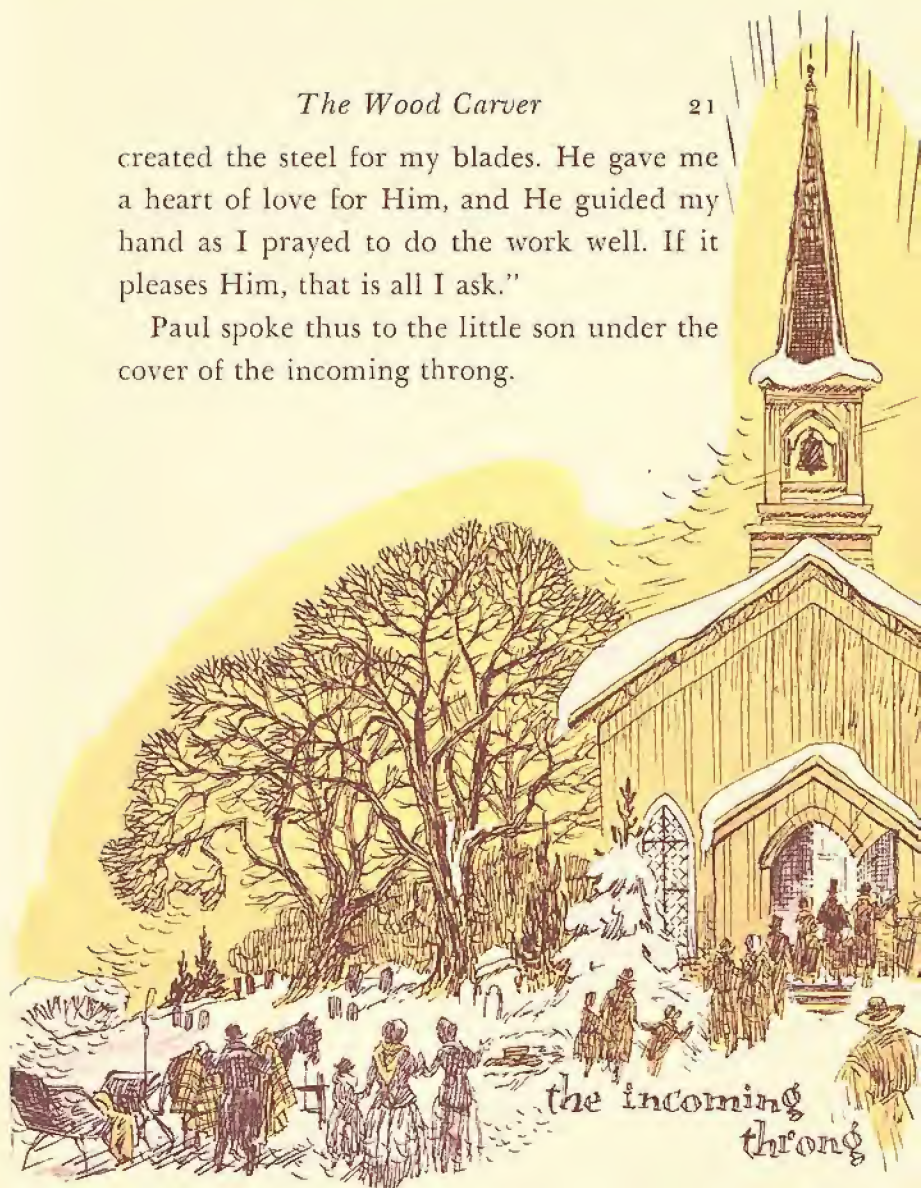
Here was the work of a man in their midst. A great artist who had caught the spirit of one of the greatest events in history: the coming of their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. And here was the Christ himself with the same hands that were later to bear the imprint of the nails for their sake! Here was the soft-eyed Mother, watching above the One who lay like a living, breathing child in their very midst. Tears were in the eyes of many as they came reverently forward at the preacher's request to view this masterpiece.

Little Peter looked up at his father proudly: "They think it is very beautiful, Father, do they not? I am glad they like it."

"Yes, little Son. They seem to feel what I hoped they would—a reverence for the Christ; but we must remember it is not my work alone. You were first to suggest it, and God had made the trees. He sent the rain and the sun and the growth of the golden wood. He

created the steel for my blades. He gave me a heart of love for Him, and He guided my hand as I prayed to do the work well. If it pleases Him, that is all I ask."

Paul spoke thus to the little son under the cover of the incoming throng.







### *The Wood Carver*

In the audience that night there was a man of great distinction: a famous surgeon from the nearby city who had been called to attend a wealthy farmer in the community during a serious illness. He was forced to remain over Christmas in the village and as he was a churchman, he attended the Christmas Eve exercises as was his wont. He it was who stood longest before the marvelous carving of the crèche. He evidently was awed by its spiritual quality, and by the amazing in-

tricacy of the carving. He recognized the great artistry of the work, and sensed the reverence and prayer that had made it possible.

After the services he inquired of the minister something of the artist. "Who is he?" "Where is he?" He would like much to meet the man. The minister made this possible by taking him at once to the back of the church where Paul had unobtrusively seated himself, with little Peter on his lap, lifted up that he might not miss anything of the gladness and excitement about him.

"Dr. Oberg, this is our Mr. Paul Friedrich, only a little over a year from Switzerland, but a beloved citizen, indeed, of whom we are proud, and this, Sir, is his son Peter."

The doctor bowed low over the hand Paul extended. "I am very glad to have the privilege of meeting the one who has done the marvelous work at the altar yonder. It is amazingly beautiful."

Paul stood up to acknowledge the stranger's commendation. "I thank you, Sir," he said shyly. "If it pleases you, I am pleased. If it is worthy it is not by my power, but by the power of God that it be so."

The doctor looked down at little Peter, his practiced eye noting at once the hip that stood out too far. He saw the pinched look of suffering on the child's face. Paul, noting the look, spoke gently: "Go now, little Peter, to the front with the other children and get your treat," and the boy limped eagerly away.

"My son, you see, is lame," the father turned again to the doctor. "He is lame from his birth. Always it hurts my heart, and I pray that he may be healed, but thus far the good God has not seen fit to do this for me." Paul drooped visibly as he spoke.

"I am a physician, Mr. Friedrich. I am at the head of a hospital in the City. I should like very much to come to see you in the

morning if I may. You see, I, too, am a carver of wood in my spare time. I learned the work in the old country and nothing quite takes its place here as a good hobby. I have done nothing as fine as this work of yours, however. I long to talk further with you of your work—and of other things, if I may.”

“Come by all means,” Paul said hospitably as they shook hands at parting. “We shall be glad to see you.”

He left the crèche at the altar as his gift to the church, and he and little Peter took their way homeward with glad hearts. Had not the service he had so lovingly rendered wrought a good work that night? Had it not sobered and blessed the eager, seeking throng as they stood so evidently moved by the power of the Christ Child, the loveliness of the gentle mother—so like his own Margaretha—and were they not much interested in the wise, overseeing attitude of the father? Yes, and





was not little Peter holding tightly to the pink tarlatan bag in his hand with its one precious orange glowing through the meshes, and did not that orange smell more fragrant than almost anything except, perhaps, the shavings that fell beneath his father's hands as he carved the wood of evenings? Little Peter thought it all most wonderful.

The next morning Dr. Emil Oberg made his way to the little cottage. He was much interested in the handmade loom, in the

wood which stood in the corner awaiting the carver's hands. He examined the sharp bright tools and asked many questions of Paul regarding his work.

Then at last he sat down and turned to his host. "Mr. Friedrich, I am much interested in this child of yours. Will you permit me to examine his hip? The child is still young and often with careful treatment a cure can be accomplished."

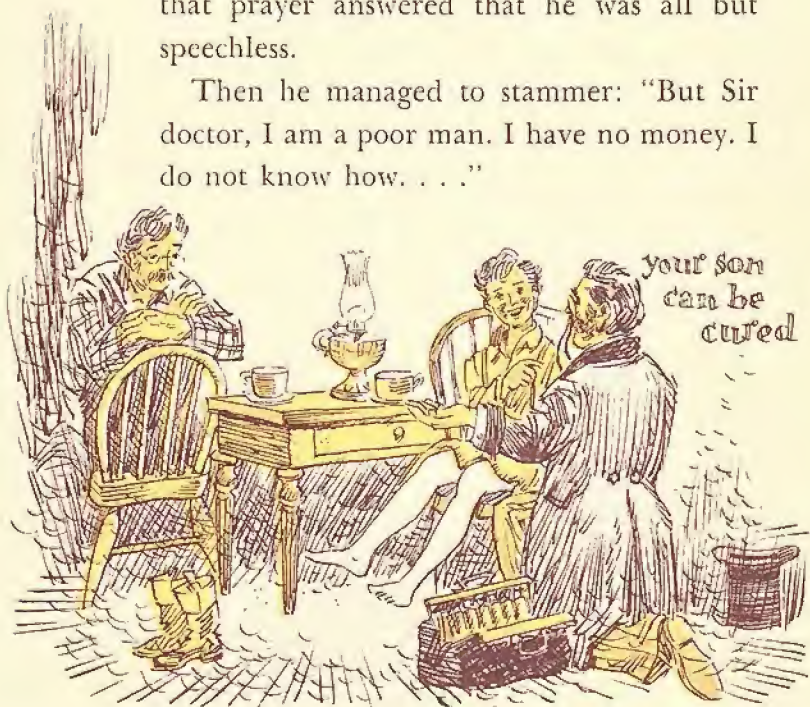
"O Sir—will you! If you only will! So long I have prayed for a healing for my son!" Paul wiped the moisture that had suddenly gathered on his forehead with the back of his hand. "Indeed, you may examine him. Come, little Peter, the good doctor here would look at your hip and God willing he may help you. Come, I will lift you onto the table."

Little Peter came obediently at the call and soon the trained hand of the surgeon had located what he was seeking.

"I believe, Sir," he said, "that your son can be cured. It will take time and patience—a year perhaps, and patience upon your and this young man's part; but I fully believe he can be made to walk normally if we undertake the case."

Paul sat down suddenly. Here was something for which he had been praying, yet he was so overcome by the prospect of having that prayer answered that he was all but speechless.

Then he managed to stammer: "But Sir doctor, I am a poor man. I have no money. I do not know how. . . ."



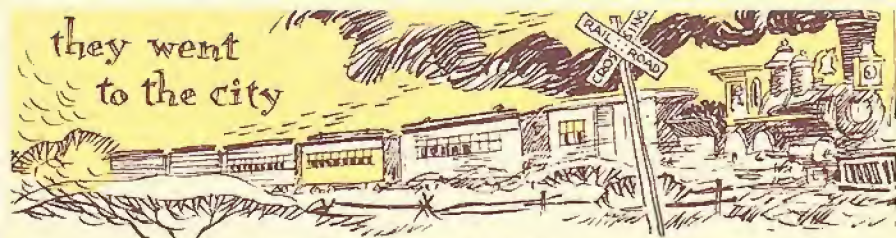
"You will need no money, my friend. I shall be glad to undertake the case at my own expense. You have done a great service for your community this night. Why should I not have the happy privilege of serving my fellowman, also?"

"But if my son goes, I must go with him. I must be both father and mother to him—I could not let him go alone," Paul faltered.

"To be sure you shall be with him. I know of a special place and a special work for you. There is a church being built in the city. A carver such as you are is needed for work on the altar and chancel. It would be a work of beauty and service. Your cottage will be waiting for you when you come back—say by next Christmas. I trust by then you may return happily, with your son healed. It will be by the power of God if this proves so. I shall be only the means through which He may work. God does the healing in any case."



they went  
to the city



And so Paul and little Peter accompanied the great doctor to the City, their hearts filled with buoyant hope.

The hospital experience was hard and long, but that power, greater than any man possesses, was at work. The surgeon was kind and patient and vitally interested in the task he had undertaken so selflessly to do. His instruments were the channels through which the healing gradually came to the little crippled lad, and as sure a healing came to the aching heart of the father as he worked faithfully at the carvings for the great city church—a work that has stood throughout the years as a testimonial of man's conscientious skill and his love for God and for his art. Always as he worked he prayed for guidance, for strength, for wisdom, and for the surgeon who was giving so selflessly of himself for Paul's dear son.

It was Christmas Eve again, and the same silver call rang out across the little village bidding its people come to the house of God in honor of the Christ Child. The church stood as before—the moon riding the sky—the stars dazzling in their silver brightness. This year little Peter did not need to be carried “piggy-back” through the snow. He skipped lightly at his father’s side, calling his attention to the star above the church roof. “Truly, my father, I think it is the Christ Child’s star come to stand again above your crèche!” The father walked slowly along, his face lifted to the stars, his heart so filled with light that it was like a lamp burning in a high tower.





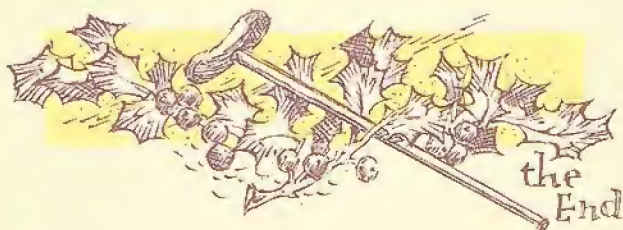
They moved into the church among the others. As the audience was seated Paul walked shyly up to the rostrum. He turned and spoke reverently, the audience growing silent as he began:

"My friends and neighbors, I am just a humble man. I do not even speak the good English, but I would like to speak a few words as my testimony of the goodness of our God. So long I had prayed that He might heal my son. You know of his lameness. I prayed also to do some service for you and for my church.



"The good God works in strange ways to answer our prayers. He guided my hands to carve this crèche here at the altar. He sent a great surgeon to be my friend and that would not have been had I not made the crèche. He came to see me because of it, and because he had a great heart and felt the pity for me and my son, he took us to the city, and he worked until the lameness was gone. I have much gratitude in my heart this night . . . and—now I would say I am glad to be back with you, my friends and my neighbors."

And this being the longest public speech Paul had ever made, he sat down quickly, wiping the moisture from his brow, and the tears from eyes that were suddenly overflowing.





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GRACE NOLL CROWELL

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